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the Snake Name Ahaetulla**

Jay M. Savage

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Bulletin of the Chicago Academy of Sciences

Two Centuries of Confusion: The History of the Snake Name *Ahaetulla*

Jay M. Savage

Natural History Museum, Stanford University, California

The correct application of the generic names *Abaetulla*, *Dendrelaphis*, *Dendrophis*, *Dryophis*, *Leptophis*, *Passerita*, and *Thalerophis* to a number of Oriental and Neotropical tree-snakes has been the subject of considerable nomenclatural controversy. Stejneger (1922, 1933), Smith (1930, 1943), Meise and Hennig (1932, 1935), Mertens (1934), and Oliver (1947, 1948) have reached varied and often conflicting conclusions concerning the allocation of these generic names. The need for a resurvey of the problem was suggested by the harassed curators of the Natural History Museum of Stanford University who were confused as to which generic name should properly apply to a tree-snake from India. Further impetus to the study was supplied when it was discovered that contrary to the statements of Meise and Hennig (1935), Smith (1943), and Oliver (1948) the name, *Coluber boiga* Lacépède, 1789, is available for one of these green tree-snakes.

The snakes primarily involved in this discussion, by virtue of their use as generic types, are *Abaetulla abaetulla* (Linné), *Abaetulla caudolineata* (Gray), and *Dryophis nasutus* (Lacépède) of southeastern Asia and *Thalerophis richardi* (Bory St. Vincent) of South America. These names are those adopted by the arrangements of Smith (1943) and Oliver (1948) in the latest reviews of the genera and will be used for the sake of clarity throughout the historical summary of the problem.

HISTORICAL

When Linné (1758, p. 225) described *Coluber abaetulla* from "Asia, America," he presented no characteristics which would unequivocally diagnose the new form. Fortunately Linné's type material is still extant and has been shown by Lönnberg (1896, p. 6, 26) and Andersson (1899, p. 22) to consist of four examples of the South American *Thalerophis richardi* and a single

specimen of the Indian *Ahaetulla ahaetulla*. The name *Coluber ahaetulla* was applied to these specimens several times (Linné 1745, 1748, and 1754) previous to the publication of the 10th edition of the *Systema Naturae*. The use of the name in these various papers is of no nomenclatural significance, however, for Linné in effect selected as the type of the species that single specimen which furnished the counts presented in the *Systema*. The type of *Coluber ahaetulla* is an example of the South American tree-snake, *Thalerophis richardi*, and Linné's 16's virtual selection of this snake as the holotype has wide nomenclatural repercussions as will be shown below.

Lacépède (1789, p. 102) presented a description of a new species of green, arboreal snake, *Coluber boiga*, based on specimens in the *Cabinet Royale* of the King of France. In recent discussions of the problem Meise and Hennig (1935, p. 148) and Smith (1943, p. 241) claim that no such name was ever proposed by Lacépède. Oliver (1948, p. 167) apparently without further investigation follows the above authors in this respect. It is obvious that these workers did not carefully scrutinize Lacépède's *Historic naturelle des quadrupèdes ovipares et des serpents* for on page 102 of part one of the second volume, in the section under "*Premier Genre Colubri*" of the "Table Methodique," is listed: "*Boiga*

Boiga." These names are followed by the number of ventrals and caudals, total length, tail length, and notes on the teeth, head and dorsal scales, and coloration. This diagnosis amply fills the requirements of Article 25 of the International Rules of Zoological Nomenclature with respect to the description of a new species. The disagreement over the availability of the name apparently stems from the belief of Meise and Hennig (1935) and Smith (1943) and Oliver (1948) that the name was not proposed according to the principles of binomial nomenclature.

An examination of the table presented by Lacépède (1789, p. 78-144) clearly indicates that all of his names are based on the Linnaean system and therefore fulfill all the requirements of an available binomial. The name "*Boiga*" as presented in Lacépède's table is used first in a vernacular sense and then as a scientific name, the second "*Boiga*" being italicized. Exactly the same procedure is employed throughout the table and applies to a number of universally accepted pre-Lacépèdean species names. In some instances the italicized scientific name is preceded by an abbreviation for the generic name, *Coluber*, and in a few cases the Latin name is omitted entirely. Meise and Hennig (1935, p. 148) upon a study of this table declare that the second italicized *Boiga* is merely a Latin substantive for the common name and therefore cannot be regarded as a binomial. Presumably their argument is based

upon the fact that the name, *Boiga*, is not preceded by "C." as are many other names in the table (e.g., *C. atrox*). This point does not appear to be well taken since a number of names proposed by Linné (1758) are listed in precisely the same manner as *Boiga*. Among the Linnaean names lacking the abbreviation for the genus *Coluber* are "*Molurus*," "*Sibon*," "*Naja*," and "*Triangulum*." Even if Lacépède was printing "Latinized substantives" this fact alone would not appear to offer a valid argument against the availability of such names. A large number of accepted and unquestioned trivial names are nothing but Latinized substantives proposed in a manner almost identical to that employed by Lacépède. Merrem (1820), for example, merely furnished Latinized substantives for his German vernacular names, yet these names have never been questioned. The issue at point appears to center around whether those Latin names presented by Lacépède, without an abbreviation for the generic name, are binomial, not whether the names are Latinized substantives. That Lacépède, a notoriously careless worker, forget to place a capital letter for the genus in front of every trivial name in his table and that some, but not all, of these names are omitted in the text and even in the text-index does not supply an acceptable reason for rejecting his names as unavailable. The two major obstacles against acceding to the interpretation of Meise and Hennig are as follows: (1) since a number of pre-Lacépèdean names, unquestionably binomial and used elsewhere in Lacépède's work in a binomial sense, appear in his table without an abbreviation for the generic name *Coluber*, the absence of the abbreviation does not in itself make the name non-binomial; (2) because several species are listed by common name alone, no support can be mustered for the theory that Lacépède's Latin names are nothing but translations of the vernacular. Both of these facts substantiate the contention that Lacépède's names were not suggested merely as Latin substitutes for his common names and clearly indicate that these names were proposed as binomials on the basis of, and according to the principles of, binomial nomenclature. Consequently, no bar exists to accepting the names in Lacépède's monograph when applicable.

An amplified description of "Le Boiga" is to be found on page 223 of the second part of volume two of Lacépède's work. The fact that a footnote (a) refers to *Coluber abaetulla* of Linné and to Daubenton's 1784 use of Le Boiga in a vernacular sense has no bearing on the question of the availability of *Coluber boiga*. Certainly no rules existed at that time and an author frequently renamed a species as he saw fit. Moreover, this is not simply an example of renaming one of Linné's species as the description is based on a series of snakes studied by Lacépède. Regardless of any reference to *Coluber abaetulla*, the name *Coluber boiga* must apply to this material.

Thus on the basis of an adequate description, based on actual material, and a validly proposed binomial, we must accept *Coluber boiga* Lacépède, 1789 as an available name. The diagnosis given by Lacépède and the ventral (166) and caudal (128) counts of the specimen which must be considered the type of this species leave no doubt that the snake described was *Abaetulla abaetulla* of current usage.

Gmelin (1789, p. 1116) described *Coluber pictus*, also based on material of *Abaetulla abaetulla*. Schmidt (1927, p. 445) as the first reviser selected *Coluber boiga* as the name for this form making *Coluber pictus* a synonym of Lacépède's name. Even if a system of page preference is invoked by the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature to replace the rule of the first reviser, as was suggested at the 1948 meeting of the Commission (Hemming, 1950, p. 124), *Coluber boiga* would still maintain priority having appeared on an earlier page than Gmelin's *Coluber pictus*.

Shaw (1802, p. 550) was the first worker to attempt to restrict the name *Coluber abaetulla* to either the Oriental or New World species. He incorrectly concluded that the name should apply to the Indian form. Shaw also describes, on page 549, a new species, *Coluber purpurascens*, a name overlooked by nearly all subsequent herpetologists. It is clear from Shaw's diagnosis that the name applies to *Dryophis prasina* (H. Boie, 1827). Under the Rules, *Coluber purpurascens* has priority over Boie's long established name. Fortunately, Shaw's name is a primary homonym preoccupied by *Coluber purpurascens* Gmelin, 1789 and as such cannot stand. This prevents the changing of a long standing name for one of the common species of oriental snakes.

Daudin (1803, p. 63) correctly inferred that Linné's *Coluber abaetulla* belongs to the Neotropical species of tree-snake now called *Thalerophis richardi*.

Link (1807, p. 73) was the first to establish a new genus for any of the snakes referred to *Coluber abaetulla*. He proposed the genus *Abaetulla* for two species, *A. fasciata* from South America and *A. mycterizans* from India. These specific names are based upon the descriptions of "Le Boiga" and "La Nazique," respectively, in Bechstein's 1801 translation of Lacépède's work of 1789. These two snakes had already been given applicable binomials by Lacépède and therefore Link's *Abaetulla fasciata* = *Coluber boiga* Lacépède and his *Abaetulla mycterizans* = *Coluber nasutus* Lacépède.

Merrem (1820, p. 136) erected the genus *Dryinus* to include the species *Coluber nasutus* Lacépède and *Coluber mycterizans* Linné. The name *Dryinus* was preoccupied in insects by *Dryinus* Latreille, 1804 and Dalman (1823, p. 7) suggested *Dryophis* as a substitute name for Merrem's homonym.

In 1825 Bell (p. 328) introduced the name *Leptophis* for the species *Coluber aestivus* Linné, 1758; *Coluber abaetulla* Linné, 1758; *Leptophis mancas* Bell, 1825; and *Coluber purpurascens* Shaw, 1802.

In the same year, subsequent to Bell's paper, Gray (1825, p. 208) presented the generic name *Abaetulla* (not of Link, 1807) for the species *Coluber decorus* Shaw, 1802; *Coluber abaetulla* Linné, 1758; *Coluber caerulescens* Linné, 1758; *Abaetulla sagitalis* E. W. Gray, a *nomen nudum*; *Coluber sagittatus* Shaw, 1802; and *Abaetulla punctulatus* Gray, 1827. The last name is a *nomen nudum* in this paper as the original description did not appear until two years later. The tautotype of this genus is *Coluber abaetulla* Linné. *Abaetulla* Gray, 1825 is a homonym and is preoccupied by Link's 1807 name. Consequently, under Article 34 of the International Rules of Zoological Nomenclature, it is stillborn and unavailable.

On the same page on which he proposes the name *Abaetulla*, Gray substitutes the name *Passerita* for *Dryinus* Merrem, 1820, apparently unaware of the action of Dalman in 823. Since only *Coluber mycterizans* Linné, 1758 is included under this genus by Gray, it must stand as the monotype of *Passerita* (under Article 30c of the Rules). Under Article 30f of the International Rules of Zoological Nomenclature *Coluber mycterizans* becomes the generic type of *Dryinus* Merrem, 1820 and *Dryophis* Dalman 1823, a substitute name for *Dryinus*, must also take the same type.

Fitzinger (1826a, p. 30, and 1826b, p. 884) proposes the name *Dendrophis* for Linné's *Coluber abaetulla*. *Dendrophis* is clearly based on a manuscript name of H. Boie and under the Rules (Article 21) the name must stand as *Dendrophis* H. Boie, 1826. Some confusion has existed as to whether Fitzinger's *Neue Classification der Reptilien* (1826a) or a short paper in the *Isis von Oken* (1826b) appeared first. Stejneger (1933) and Mertens (1934) on the basis of the dates printed in the two works both agree that the article in *Isis* appeared previous to the *Neue Classification*. Meise and Hennig (1935, p 148) present evidence that indicates that the *Neue Classification* was published before the report in *Isis*. While the evidence appears to be conclusive that Fitzinger's paper in *Isis* appeared sometime after July 21, 1826, these authors are wrong in accepting the published date as correct for the *Neue Classification*. The "Vorrede" by Fitzinger in this latter work is signed and dated as June 4, 1826, and the paper must have appeared subsequent to that time. This leaves us with no definite information as to when either paper appeared and no sound chronology can be ascertained from the available dates. The point is of little importance, however, since Fitzinger selects *Coluber abaetulla* as the generic type in the *Neue Classification der Reptilien* and lists only that species

under the generic name in the Isis article. Fitzinger plainly states (1826a, p. 30) that *Dendrophis* H. Boie is a substitute name for *Abaetulla* Gray and as such it must take the same type. Fortunately *Coluber abaetulla* Linné already stands as the tautotype of Gray's *Abaetulla*.

F. Boie (1827, p. 519) selected as the type (logotype) of Merrem's genus *Dryinus* the species *Coluber nasutus* Lacépède. This selection is antedated by Gray's action in 1825 in selecting a type for *Passerita*, a substitute for *Dryinus*, and *Coluber mycterizans* Linné must remain as the type of this genus.

Gray (in Griffith, 1831, p. 93) uses the name *Aboetulla* (not *Abaetulla*) as a substitute name for *Leptophis* Bell, 1825. As such it must take the same type as Bell's genus.

Fitzinger (1843, p. 26) in his classic *Systema Reptilium* designated *Coluber abaetulla* Linné as the type of the genus *Leptophis* Bell, 1825. This makes *Abaetulla* Gray and *Dendrophis* H. Boie strict synonyms of *Leptophis*. Fitzinger also disregards his previous selection in 1826 of *Coluber abaetulla* as the generic type of *Dendrophis* and selects *Coluber pictus* Gmelin, 1789 as the type of that genus. This does not alter the fact that in the original description of the genus *Dendrophis*, *Coluber abaetulla* was designated as the generic type. In addition Fitzinger (1826b, p. 884) lists only *Coluber abaetulla* under the generic name *Dendrophis* and F. Boie (1827, p. 519) selects that species as the type of the genus.

Boulenger (1890, p. 339) separated the species *caudolineata* Gray, 1834 from the other members of the genus *Dendrophis*, making it the type of a monotypic genus, *Dendrelaphis*.

Schmidt (1927, p. 445) was the first herpetologist to uncover Link's old name *Abaetulla*. He assigned the name to the Asian species at present referred to that genus. Furthermore, at the suggestion of Dr. Leonhard Stejneger, he revived Lacépède's name *boiga* to replace the long used *pictus* of Gmelin, 1789. Unfortunately this was done under the assumption that Lacépède's work appeared a year previous to Gmelin's. This was not true.

Since neither name is known to have been published before the other in 1789, Schmidt's choice as the first reviser must hold no matter how fallacious the grounds upon which his selection was made (see International Rules, Article 28 and Stejneger, 1933, p. 201). Even if the principle of page precedence is utilized to replace the principle of the first reviser (see Hemming 1950, p. 124) *boiga* would still have priority over *pictus* as has been explained above.

Smith (1930, p. 51) apparently unaware of Schmidt's remarks concerning Link's *Abaetulla*, used *Abaetulla* Gray, 1825 for the same genus. He designated as the type of this genus *Coluber decorus* Shaw, 1802 *Coluber boiga* Lacépède, 1789. On the basis of F. Boie's (1827, p. 520, 541) state-

ments concerning the type of *Dendrophis* he reduced the later name to the synonymy of *Ahaetulla* Gray. The type of Gray's genus, by reason of tautonymy, is however *Coluber ahaetulla* Linné.

Meise and Hennig (1932, p. 296) designated *Coluber mycterizans* Link, 1807 (not of Linné, 1758) = *Coluber nasutus* Lacépède, 1789 as the type of the genus *Ahaetulla* Link, 1807. They also refuse to recognize *Coluber boiga* Lacépède as a valid name.

Following these developments Stejneger (1933, p. 201), in a most scholarly study of the problem, concludes that since the genotype of *Passerita* is also *Coluber nasutus* Lacépède, the name *Ahaetulla* Link, 1807 must supersede that name and apply to a group of Indo-Malayan snakes for which it was never intended. Stejneger was mistaken in his generic type. *Coluber mycterizans* Linné, 1758 is the monotype of Gray's *Passerita*. However, *Coluber mycterizans* Linné and *Coluber nasutus* Lacépède are congeneric and Stejneger's conclusion regarding the zoological application of the name holds. Stejneger also mistakenly accepts Fitzinger's designation, in the *Systema Reptilium*, of *Coluber pictus* Gmelin, 1789 as the type of the genus *Dendrophis*. In addition, he considered *Dryophis* Dalman to have been proposed in 1826 and consequently considered it to be a synonym of *Passerita* Gray. Under his arrangement *Dendrophis* would apply to the Asian snakes while *Leptophis* would be employed for the South American forms. These conclusions are based upon his choice of applying *Coluber ahaetulla* to the Neotropical species and *Coluber boiga* to the Asian form.

Mertens (1934) quite correctly showed that *Dendrophis* is a strict synonym of *Leptophis* since both have the same generic type and he resurrected Boulenger's (1890, p. 339) name, *Dendrelaphis* (monotype, *Dendrophis caudolineatus* Gray, 1834), for the Asian species. He suggests that the genus may be divisible into two genera and proposes the new name, *Tachyophis* (orthotype, *Coluber pictus* Gmelin = *Coluber boiga* Lacépède) for those forms which might be separated from *D. caudolineatus*. This is based upon the assumption that *Coluber ahaetulla* refers to the South American species. Unfortunately, *Tachyophis* is a homonym and cannot stand, being preoccupied by *Tachyophis* Rochebrune, 1884.

Meise and Hennig (1935, p. 147) report nothing new but maintain that Lacépède's table does not furnish a new species name in *Coluber boiga*.

Smith (1943, p. 241), in error, states that no *Coluber boiga* was ever proposed. He assumes that "Le Boiga" is based on *Coluber ahaetulla* and consequently Link's *Ahaetulla fasciata* must be a strict synonym of *C. ahaetulla* Linné. Therefore, under the Rules the type of the genus *Ahaetulla* Link would become *Coluber ahaetulla* by absolute tautonymy (Article 30d). This

has the pleasant result of preventing the foisting off of *Abaetulla* onto the Indo-Malayan group which according to Smith should be known as *Dryophis Dalman*. Under this plan, with the attaching of *C. abaetulla* to the Asian form, *Leptophis* and *Dendrophis* become synonyms of *Abaetulla* leaving the Neotropical group without a name.

Oliver (1947, p. 64), following Smith, proposed the name *Thalerophis* (orthotype, *Coluber richardi* Bory St. Vincent, 1823) for the South American species. Oliver (1948, p. 167-169) in the most recent review of the problem presents a very thorough analysis of the nomenclatural history of the groups involved and retains the conclusions propounded by Smith (1943).

As an interesting sidelight on the major portion of this paper, it should be noted that Oliver's (1948, p. 169) argument for *Coluber richardi* Bory St. Vincent, 1823, as the first available name for the South American species, is invalid. If we follow the reasoning of Smith and Oliver, the first name available for the Neotropical form is *Coluber filiformis* Linné, 1758. Oliver chooses to disregard this name on the basis of Andersson's (1899, p. 23), statement under *C. filiformis*: "This Linnaean type has not been identified by the authors." Oliver interprets this to mean that Andersson did not see the type of this species. Andersson does not use the phrase "the authors" as an editorial third person as appears to be the opinion of Oliver. Actually Andersson's use of the phrase refers to other authors, that is to those subsequent to Linné (= "Auctorum" Auctorum!). Other examples of this style are found throughout his paper.

Andersson after explaining that authors subsequent to Linné have never attempted to associate the name *Coluber filiformis* with any species, definitely identifies the type of the species as being a *Leptophis liocercus* or *Leptophis abaetulla*. Both of these names as used by Andersson are synonyms of *Thalerophis richardi* of Oliver. An examination of Andersson's description of the type of *C. filiformis* and a comparison with Urine's original description leaves no doubt that the specimen studied by Andersson is the type of *Coluber filiformis* Linné, 1758. Neither Linné's nor Andersson's descriptions give enough information to make it possible to successfully allocate the name *filiformis* to any one of Oliver's 12 subspecies of *Thalerophis richardi*. Linné's type, on the basis of geographical probability and the brief discussion given by Andersson, must be one of three currently recognized forms. These subspecies *T. r. richardi*, *T. r. liocercus*, and *T. r. coeruleodorsus* are all from eastern South America. *T. r. liocercus* possibly could be eliminated from consideration on the basis of the number of caudals and ventrals but no way can be devised definitely to identify the type of *filiformis* with either of the other two races.

While Oliver's statement that *Coluber filiformis* is unidentifiable (sub-specifically!) from the available descriptions is correct, the type of the species is still in existence and can be examined to determine which subspecies is involved in the controversy. Repeated efforts to have someone at the Royal Museum in Stockholm examine the type to determine its correct position have failed and the subject must await the actual study of that specimen before final conclusions are possible. Obviously at that time the name *Coluber filiformis* might replace one of the names currently employed for one of the eastern subspecies of *Thalerophis richardi*.

SUMMARY OF THE PROBLEM

From the above historical account it becomes apparent that two major schools of thought have been prevalent since the time of Shaw (1802) and Daudin (1803) in consequence of the composite nature of Linné's material. Following one modern group (Stejneger and Mertens) the name *Coluber abae-tulla* should be given to the New World form at present known as *Thalerophis richardi*. Others (particularly Smith and Oliver) argue with equal vigor that *C. abaetulla* properly belongs to the Asian species. The importance of a decision as to which species (Asian or Neotropical) the name *Coluber abaetulla* Linné should apply prompted Oliver to say, "Whether *Coluber abaetulla* Linneaus is to be associated with an Asiatic or an American species can always be a potential source of disagreement unless a ruling on its status is obtained from the International Committee on Zoological Nomenclature."

CONCLUSIONS

Happily no such ruling is necessary. The whole controversy was settled before it began by Linné in 1758 when he listed the ventral and caudal counts of an American specimen in the original description of *Coluber abaetulla* in the *Systema Naturae*. This single specimen so listed must stand as the holotype of the species and definitely associates the name *abaetulla* with the South American form. Since the type was from Surinam and the ventral and caudal counts agree well with the subspecies recognized from that area, the name *Coluber abaetulla* Linné, 1758 must replace *Coluber richardi* Bory St. Vincent, 1823 as the name of the South American species. The name *Coluber filifor- mis* Linné, 1758 may for the present be considered a synonym of *Coluber abaetulla*.

Stemming from this conclusion the genera involved in the above discussion must henceforth be known as:

I. South American

- A. *Leptophis* Bell, 1825 (logotype, *Coluber abaetulla* Linné, 1758, by Fitzinger, 1843). Synonyms of *Leptophis* would be: *Abaetulla* Gray, 1825 (tautotype, *Coluber abaetulla* Linné, 1758); *Dendrophis* H. Boie, 1826 (orthotype, *Coluber abaetulla* Linné, 1758); *Aboetulla* Gray, 1831 (substitute name for *Leptophis* Bell; takes same type); *Thalerophis* Oliver, 1947 (orthotype, *Coluber richardi* Bory St. Vincent, 1823 *Coluber abaetulla* Linné, 1758).

II. Asian

- A. *Dendrelaphis* Boulenger, 1890 (monotype, *Abaetula candolineata* Gray, 1834). *Tachyophis* Mertens, 1934 (orthotype, *Coluber pictus* Gmelin, 1789 = *Coluber boiga* Lacépède, 1789) is a synonym of *Dendrelaphis*. *Tachyophis* Rochebrune, 1884 has already been used for a genus of fossil snakes and Merten's name is therefore a homonym and unavailable. Alan E. Leviton of the Natural History Museum of Stanford University, who has studied this group in some detail, informs me that he considers *Dendrelaphis candolineata* and *Dendrelaphis boiga* to be congeneric and it is therefore not necessary to propose a substitute for Mertens' name.
- B. *Ahaetulla* Link, 1807 (logotype, *Coluber mycterizans* Link, 1807 = *Coluber nasutus* Lacépède, 1789, by Meise and Hennig, 1932). Synonyms are: *Dryinus* Merrem, 1820 (logotype, *Coluber mycterizans* Linné, 1758, by Gray, 1825), a homonym; *Dryophis* Dalman, 1823 and *Passerita* Gray, 1825 are both substitute names for *Dryinus* Merrem and consequently take the same type.

Two trivial names are changed by this revision:

Thalerophis richardi richardi (Bory St. Vincent, 1823) is replaced by *Leptophis abaetulla abaetulla* (Linné, 1758) and *Abaetulla abaetulla* (Linné, 1758), (*sense* Smith, 1943) should be known as *Dendrelaphis boiga* (Lacépède, 1789).

These conclusions are the only ones possible under the existing Rules of Zoological Nomenclature or under the revised rulings approved by the International Zoological Congress in 1948. Some herpetologists may decry

the shuffling of names necessitated by the analysis presented here and might suggest that the plenary powers of the Commission on Zoological Nomenclature be exercised to prevent this new interpretation from replacing the conclusions of Smith (1943) and Oliver (1948). The arguments against the suspension of the Rules in this case are too numerous to enumerate, but the most important points are summarized below. (1) Since 1745 when Linné first used the name *Coluber abaetulla*, the name has been utilized with equal frequency for both a South American and an Asian species of tree-snake. Because of the confusion of these two forms under a single name no single interpretation of its allocation has long endured and no "continuity principle" (see Schmidt and Conant, 1950, p. 58) can be argued to reserve this name for the Asian species. (2) In order to maintain a nomenclature even approaching a system similar to those presented by Smith (1943) and Oliver (1948) the Rules would have to be suspended no less than five times. To definitely insure stability and establish the species and generic names even the *Systema Naturae* would have to be suspended, a case without precedent.

If these two very strong arguments against application to the Commission were overlooked, a thorough understanding and summary of the problem would still be essential before any worthwhile decision could be reached. It is hoped that this paper will serve either as a foundation for the stabilizing of the snake name *Abaetulla* or as the starting point for any action taken by the Commission on Zoological Nomenclature. In either event this discussion may contribute toward the stability of herpetological nomenclature.

SUMMARY

1. A historical account of the generic names *Abaetulla*, *Dendrelaphis*, *Dendrophis*, *Dryophis*, *Leptophis*, *Passerita*, and *Thalerophis* as applied to a number of Asian and American green, tree-snakes is presented.

2. The species name *Coluber boiga* Lacépède, 1789 is shown to be a validly proposed binomial available for a species of Asian tree-snakes.

3. The Linnean name *Coluber filiformis* is proven to be an available name applicable to a subspecies of "*Thalerophis richardi*," but cannot be employed until an examination of the type specimen is made.

4. The definite association of the name *Coluber abaetulla* Linné, 1758 with a South American tree-snake in the original description forces a complete reshuffling of the generic and specific names of a number of Asian and Neotropical arboreal snakes.

5. Following from the correct application of the name *Coluber abaetulla* to the South American species, the Asian genus (*Abaetulla* of Smith, 1943)

must stand as *Dendrelaphis* Boulenger, 1890 and the Neotropical genus (*Thalerophis* of Oliver, 1948) must become *Leptophis* Bell, 1825. The generic name *Abaetulla* Link, 1807 after suffering one hundred and fifty years of nomenclatural vicissitudes must apply to a genus of Asian snakes for which it never was intended (*Dryophis* of Smith, 1943).

6. Reasons are presented to illustrate the difficulties inherent in an application to the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature for suspension of the Rules to settle the name *Coluber abaetulla* upon an Asian species.

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